

London County Council.

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(7)

OPENING

OF

LINCOLN'S INN FIELDS

BY

SIR JOHN HUTTON,

*Chairman of the Council*

ON

SATURDAY, 23RD FEBRUARY, 1895,

At 2.30 p.m.









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History of acquisition and historical particulars  
of the site. Prepared by Jno. J. Sexby, Chief  
Officer, Parks Sub-Department.

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### *History of acquisition.*



THE acquisition of Lincoln's-inn-fields as a public garden has long commended itself as a desirable act. The first step towards this object, as far as the Council is concerned, arose from a notice of motion by Mr. John Lloyd, L.C.C., in October, 1890. At the same time the Parks Committee received many communications from various individuals and public bodies urging them to take steps in the matter. The Metropolitan Public Gardens Association in particular pressed the subject upon the Council, stating that they had themselves tried to secure the opening of the fields, but had failed. The trustees were approached with this object in view, but they stated that the terms of their Act prevented them from allowing the gardens to be used by the public, and that no other Act would enable them to do so except the Metropolitan Open Spaces Act, 1881; but they were satisfied that it would be quite impossible for them to obtain the necessary consent to the proposed arrangement.

The Act referred to by the trustees is the 8 Geo. II., 1735, by which they are to preserve and maintain the fields, and have power to levy a rate for this purpose. Their interest in the fields was leasehold for 900 years from 1657 at the rent of 20s. per annum—the freeholders apparently being the Society of Lincoln's-inn. As therefore Parliamentary powers were necessary to enable the trustees to make arrangements for the admission of the public, the Council decided in November, 1891, to insert a provision in their next general powers Bill for the purchase of the land by agreement. This clause was accordingly inserted, but when the Bill was considered by the Committee of the House of Commons it was decided, in the

absence of four of the members, that "so much of the preamble as refers to Lincoln's-inn-fields is not proved." The Committee, however, desired the Chairman to state "that they would see with pleasure the opening of Lincoln's-inn fields, but that they decline to over-ride the provisions of the Metropolitan Open Spaces Act of 1881."

As these steps to arrive at a voluntary agreement had failed, the only course that remained was to apply for compulsory powers to acquire the gardens in the usual way, which involved the liability to purchase, unless otherwise agreed, any estate in the land which might be a subject measure for compensation. A clause was accordingly inserted in the Open Spaces Bill of 1893 for the acquisition of Lincoln's-inn-fields. This bill successfully passed the Committee of the House of Commons, but the Select Committee of the House of Lords, after hearing counsel and witnesses for and against the proposal, decided to strike out the portion relating to Lincoln's-inn-fields. Each rejection of this clause involved a delay of a year, and the hope of acquisition now seemed as far off as at the commencement; but the Council decided to make a third attempt, and to once more introduce in its 1894 Bill a clause on the lines passed by the House of Commons. The trustees were communicated with, with regard to the terms upon which they would surrender their rights, and their proposals were as follows—

1. That the whole of the garden inclosure be leased to the London County Council for a term of 661½ years from Midsummer, 1894 (this being the remainder of the term of the lease, dated 20th June, 1657, less one year), at the rent of 20s. per annum.
2. That a sum of £12,000 be paid, as purchase-money, to the trustees to cover the original purchase-money of the land, and the money subsequently expended in the formation of the garden inclosure, erection of shelter, lavatories, &c.
3. A clause to be inserted in the bill regulating the division of the funds in the trustees' hands among the freeholders and leaseholders (to be settled hereafter by the trustees after further consideration).
4. The lease to contain certain covenants relating to the erection of buildings, and arrangements for the use of the garden.
5. That the Act of 8 George II. be kept on foot for the purpose of rating and all other purposes not inconsistent with the lease to the County Council, but that any further rates to be levied by the trustees under that Act be limited to the purposes



of carrying out the trusts of that Act as modified by the proposed lease.

6. That the secretary of the trustees be compensated by the London County Council for his loss of office in accordance with the terms of the Metropolitan Open Spaces Act, 1881.

The principal question raised by these proposals was the amount of purchase-money, £12,000, which certainly seemed somewhat high, having regard to the limitations named in the Act of Parliament ; but as no other terms were obtainable, the desirableness of the acquisition outweighed other considerations, and the clause in the London County Council (Improvements) Act, 1894, was framed on these lines. The amount of the purchase-money was to be paid into court, for payment to such claimants as might legally prove their title to receive compensation. The bill received the Royal Assent on the 17th August, 1894, and the purchase-money having been paid, the Council obtained possession on the 7th November, 1894. The legal costs and stamp duty, amounting to about £1,000, made the total cost of acquiring this garden, which is  $7\frac{1}{4}$  acres in extent, £13,000. Since the ground has been under the charge of the Parks Committee, small works of general improvement have been commenced, and when the proper season arrives, various planting works will have to be undertaken in order to embellish and decorate the garden.

#### *Historical particulars of site.*

On approaching this noble square from the neighbourhood of Clare-market, we come across a small establishment which couples the information that it is "The Old Curiosity Shop" immortalized by Charles Dickens with the announcement that the highest prices are given for white and coloured rags, bones, waste paper, &c. This combination of the romantic and the practical applies equally to the historic houses of Lincoln's-inn-fields. What were formerly the mansions of prime ministers, lord chancellors, and nobility of every degree, are now split up into innumerable chambers and offices for the lesser lights of the legal profession. The square itself forms part of some 20 acres of fields which were turned into a building estate by Messrs. Cowper, Healey and Cowper about 1657. These fields went originally by the name of Ficket's-field, Fikattesfeld, or Ficetsfeld, which name may have been derived from some very remote owner. This was in 1657 divided into two fields, the dividing line passing through the site of the present square would stretch from about the centre of the Soane Museum to the centre of the College of Surgeons. The land on the east side

of this line was called Cupfield, and that on the west side Pursefield. From time immemorial it has been a place devoted to the recreation of the students of Lincoln's-inn and the general public. One of the names it formerly bore, viz, that of Campus Templariorum, or the Templars' field, informs us that it was in the possession of that powerful order before their dissolution.

In all early deeds it is referred to as a field or fields, and it was probably laid out with walks at a very remote period. An ancient petition presented to Parliament during the Interregnum gives us some interesting particulars as to the uses to which it was put in the reign of Edward III. This petition states that it appears from record that "in those times" (about 1376) "this field was a common walking and sporting place for the clerks of the Chancery, apprentices, and students of the law, and citizens of London; and that upon a clamorous complaint made by them unto the King, that one Roger Leget, had privily laid and hid many iron engines called caltrappes, as well in the bottome as the top of a certaine trench in Ficket's Field (*i.e.*, Lincoln's-inn-fields), neere the Bishop of Chichester's house, where the said clerkes, apprentices, and other men of the said city, had wont to have their common passage, in which place he knew that they daily exercised their common walks and disports, with a malicious and malevolent intent, that all who came upon the said trench should be maimed or else most grievously hurt; which engines were found by the foresaid clerkes, apprentices, and others passing that way, and brought before the King's counsell, in the Chapter-house of the Friars, preachers of London, and there openly shewed; that hereupon the said Roger was brought before the said counsell to answer the premises; and being there examined by the said counsell, confessed his said fault and malice in manner aforesaid, and thereupon submitted himselfe to the King and his counsell. Whereupon the said Roger was sent to the King's prison of the Fleete, there to expect the King's grace." The petition then concludes "that any device to interrupt or deprive such clerks, and citizens, of their free common walking or disport there, is a nuisance and offence punishable by the King and his counsell by fine and long imprisonment; and that the King and counsell have ever been very careful of preserving the liberties and interests of the lawyers and citizens in these fields, for their care and refreshment." As in course of time London began to enlarge its bounds, and land thereby became more valuable, owners of property in Lincoln's-inn-fields began to erect buildings here, which were of a mixed character. A proposal to add more led to the Lords of the Privy Council



sending a protest to the County Justices in September, 1613. Five years later James I. granted a commission to Francis Bacon, Lord Chancellor, and others, "to reduce Lincoln's Inn Fields into walks," his idea being to make it like Moorfields. The commissioners had the aid of the King's architect, Inigo Jones, who only lived to design the west side, which was called the Arch Row. We shall have occasion to refer later on to his architectural work here, but we can gather from the terms of this commission some description of the fields at this time. It showed "that the grounds called Lincoln's Inn Fields were then much planted round with dwellings and lodgings of noblemen and men of qualitie; but at the same time it was deformed by cottages and mean buildings, encroachments on the field, and nuisances to the neighbourhood." The commissioners were therefore directed to reform those grievances, and "according to their discretion to frame and reduce those fields called 'Cup Field and Purse Field,' both for sweetness, uniformitie and comeliness, into such walkes, partitions or other plottes, and in such sorte, manner and forme, both for publique health and pleasure, as by the said Inigo Jones, &c., is or accordingly shall be done by the way of map." It is a popular tradition that the square was reduced to the size of the base of the Great Pyramid, but the fallacy of this is seen at once in comparing the respective areas. The troubles of the succeeding reign prevented the improvement works being completed, and laid the way open for more building. This led to the petition before referred to, which resulted in a peremptory proclamation by Oliver Cromwell, dated Whitehall, August 11th, 1656 :

" Upon consideration of the Humble Petition of the Society of Lincoln's Inn, and of divers persons of quality, inhabitants in and about the fields, heretofore called by the several names of Pier's Field,\* Cup Field, and Fitchet's Field, and now known by the name of Lincoln's Inn Fields, adjoining to the said Society . . . . setting forth among other things that divers persons have prepared very great store of bricks for the erecting of new buildings upon the said Fields; Ordered by his Highness the Lord Protector and the Council that there be a stay of all further buildings . . . . . and that it be recommended to the Justices of the Peace for the City of Westminster and liberties thereof to take care that there be no such new buildings, nor proceeding in any such buildings already begun." In the following year a bill was introduced to check the increase of buildings, but a proviso was inserted "for the erection and finishing of certain houses and new buildings on three sides of the fields called Lincoln's Inn Fields; and for the conveying and opening the rest and

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\* Called "Purse Field" in the commission of James I.

residue of the said fields unto the Society of Lincoln's Inn, and for the laying of the same into walks for common use and benefit, whereby the great annoyances which formerly have been to the said fields, will be taken away, and passengers there for the future better secured."\*

We see here for the first time that the fields were legally conveyed to the Society of Lincoln's Inn, who were by the articles stated to be interested in the advantage of the prospect and air of the said field. Under the agreement the benchers of Lincoln's-inn leased to the owners for 900 years the Cnp field at a rent of 20s. per annum, but they were never to build on it.

The previous history of the ownership is very obscure. In 1221 the order of Black Friars were granted a piece of ground "without the wall of the City by Oldborne (Holborn) near unto the old Temple," upon which they built a monastery facing Holborn. This monastic building and land in the time of Edward I. was in the possession of Harry Lacy, Earl of Lincoln, from whom we obtain the name of Lincoln's-inn. He died without issue in 1312. The Society of Lincoln's Inn was founded about 1310, but how the property became theirs is a mystery.

These several acts and mandates most certainly did not put an end to the nuisances that existed here. We shall be able to gather from contemporary writings what they were. In very early times the fields had been the scene of several executions. The fourteen conspirators who had plotted to assassinate Queen Elizabeth and set free Mary Queen of Scots were executed here. This attempt was known as the Babington conspiracy, and in September, 1586, having been found guilty, they were all "hanged, bowelled, and quartered, in Lincoln's Inn Fields, on a stage or scaffold of timber, strongly made for that purpose, even in the place where they used to meete and to conferre of their traitourous practices."† Nearly a hundred years after, namely in 1683, William, Lord Russell, was executed here on the charge of being concerned in the Rye House Plot. "Some have said that the Duke of York moved that he might be executed in Southampton Square before his own house, but that the king rejected that as indecent. So Lincoln's Inn Fields was the place appointed for his execution."‡ "Through these fields in the reign of Charles II. Thomas Sadler, a well-known thief, attended by his confederates, made his mock procession at night, with the mace and purse of the Lord Chancellor Finch, which they had stolen from the chancellor's closet in Great Queen Street, immediately adjoining, and were

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\* Burton, Diary, vol. II., p. 259.

† Stow's Ann., p. 1236.

‡ Burnet's "Own Times." Ed. 1823, vol. II., p. 377.

carrying to their lodging in Knightrider Street. One of the confederates walked before Sadler with the mace of the Lord Chancellor exposed on his shoulder, and another followed after him, carrying the chancellor's purse, equally prominent. Sadler was executed at Tyburn for this theft."\* For another fifty years after these events these fields were the haunt of several worthless characters. Cripples of all kinds made this a regular hunting ground; not content with extorting money by the display of their apparent misfortunes, they took to intimidating passers-by with their crutches. The literature of the seventeenth century contains frequent allusions to the "mumpers" and "rufflers" of Lincoln's-inn-fields, which were the names given to these idle vagrants. An extract from "*The London Spy*" runs as follows—"We went into the Lane Hospital, where a parcel of wretches were hopping about by the assistance of their crutches, like so many Lincoln's Inn Fields mumpers, drawing into a body to attack the coach of some charitable lord." The "rufflers" were beggars who assumed the character of maimed soldiers, and imposed upon the credulity of sympathetic passers-by. Blount in his "*Law Dictionary*" tells us that here he had seen the game of "The Wheel of Fortune" played by idle persons, "wherein they turn about a thing like the hand of a clock," supposed by some, he says, to be the same as the game of "Closhe," forbidden by a statute of the reign of Edward IV. "Here Lilly, the astrologer, when a servant at Mr. Wright's, at the corner house over against Strand bridge, spent his idle hours in bowling with 'Wat the cobbler, Dick the blacksmith, and such like companions.' Another sport in connection with this place is mentioned by Locke, in his directions for a foreigner visiting England, who could see 'wrestling in Lincoln's Inn Fields all the summer.'"† We have another allusion to the dangers of this spot in the following—

Where Lincoln's Inn wide space is rail'd around,  
 Cross not with venturous step; there oft is found  
 The lurking thief, who, while the daylight shone,  
 Made the walls echo with his begging tone;  
 That crutch, which late compassion mov'd, shall wound  
 Thy bleeding head, and fell thee to the ground.  
 Though thou art tempted by the linkman's‡ call,  
 Yet trust him not along the lonely wall;  
 In the mid-way he'll quench the flaming brand,  
 And share the booty with the pilfering band.  
 Still keep the public streets where oily rays,  
 Shot from the crystal lamp, o'erspread the ways.

Gay's "Trivia."

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\* "*London Past and Present*," vol. II., p. 393.

† H. B. Wheatley's "*London Past and Present*," vol. II., p. 394.

‡ From link, a torch. Hence man carrying torch to show the way.



The rail referred to above was only a wooden post and rail, not the present iron fencing. An incident related in the following extract from a newspaper, dated June 7th, 1733, probably had some effect in remedying the nuisances which then existed. It tells us that "Yesterday in the evening His Honour the Master of the Rolls, crossing Lincoln's Inn Fields, was rode over by a boy who was airing an horse there; by which accident he was much bruised." The sober majesty of the law could not be offended in this undignified manner, and although there must be a slight reservation "*non post, ergo propter*," it certainly was shortly after this that an Act was passed enabling the inhabitants on and after June 2nd, 1735, to make a rate upon themselves, from the proceeds of which the fields were to be enclosed, and afterwards maintained and kept in order. This led to the erection of the present iron railings, and most jealously have the public been kept from the enclosure ever since. We may apply to it the words of a popular song—

They played in the beautiful garden,  
The children of high degree;  
Outside the gates the beggars  
Passed by in their misery.

With longing eyes have the children from the stuffy courts of Drury-lane and Clare-market watched the play of their more fortunate brothers and sisters through the railings which have kept them from the enjoyment of this garden, which is the only glimpse many of them have of the beauties of nature. They at any rate will be grateful for this acquisition to the parks of London.

To come now to consider some of the historical buildings in Lincoln's-inn-fields, we will commence with the west side, formerly called the Arch-row. This contains examples of the work of Inigo Jones. Lindsay House, No. 59, was built by him for the Earl of Lindsay, who was the Royalist commander at the outbreak of civil war under Charles I., killed at the battle of Edgehill. The fourth Earl of Lindsay was created Duke of Ancaster, and the name of the mansion was changed to Ancaster House. It was subsequently purchased by the proud Duke of Somerset. "Old Somerset is at last dead. . . . To Lady Frances, the eldest, he has conditionally given the fine house built by Inigo Jones in Lincoln's Inn Fields, which he had bought of the Duke of Ancaster for the duchess, hoping that his daughter will let her mother live with her."\* The external features of the house are the same, except that the urns which formerly ornamented the balustrade along the front of the roof have disappeared.

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\* H. Walpole to Mann, December 15th. 1748. vol. ii., p. 137.

Powis House, No. 67, at the corner of Great Queen-street, was built in 1686 by William Herbert, Viscount Montgomery and Marquis of Powis, on the site of a former house which was destroyed by fire. The architect was Captain William Winde. This house also changed its name when it was sold to Holles, Duke of Newcastle, prime minister in the reign of George II., when it was called Newcastle House. A good story is told in connection with this house, which is said to have put an end to the expensive custom of "vailsgiving" or the feeing of all the servants, who used to assemble in the hall on the departure of guests. "Sir Timothy Waldo, on his way from the duke's dinner table to his carriage, put a crown into the hand of the cook, who returned it, saying: 'Sir, I do not take silver.' 'Don't you, indeed?' said Sir Timothy, putting it in his pocket, 'then I do not give gold.'"<sup>\*</sup> In latter years (1827-1879) this house was the head-quarters of the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, now in Northumberland-avenue. A gloomy archway (said to be the work of Inigo Jones) leads to Sardinia-street, formerly Duke-street, on the south side of which is the Sardinian Roman Catholic chapel. This building, the oldest of its kind in London, was originally attached to the residence of the Sardinian ambassador. At one time it was the chief centre of the Roman Catholic worship, but it is now only a church for the immediate neighbourhood. It was severely attacked and partly destroyed in the Gordon riots of 1780.

The principal building on the south side, which was formerly known as Portugal-row, is the Royal College of Surgeons, built on the site of a house belonging to Lord Chancellor Northington. It contains the splendid museum of John Hunter, from whose executors it was purchased by Government for £15,000. The greater portion of the present building was erected from the designs of Sir Charles Barry, but the subsequent additions to the museum have necessitated the enlargement of the building on more than one occasion. One of these extensions led to the demolition of the celebrated Lincoln's Inn Fields Theatre, which was situated at the back of the College of Surgeons. There have been three distinct theatres on this site. The first was originally a tennis-court, and was converted into a theatre by Sir William Davenant in 1660. Pepys frequently used to go there, in fact so often that it made Mrs. Pepys "as mad as the devil." His opinion of it is that "it is the finest play-house, I believe, that ever was in England." After the death of Davenant it reverted to its former use and became a tennis-court again.

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<sup>\*</sup> Pugh's "Life of Jonas Hanway," 1787, p. 184.



The second theatre on the same site was opened in 1695, and is described by Cibber as "but small and poorly fitted up within. Within the walls of a tennis quaree court, which is of the lesser sort."\* The third building was commenced by Christopher Rich, and opened by his son John Rich. This latter actor first introduced the now popular pantomimes here, which were a great success; but the chief event connected with this building was the production of the *Beggars' Opera* by Gay, which had so great a run "that it made Gay rich and Rich gay." The theatre then had many changes, it was used as a barrack, as a china depository, and finally pulled down, as we have seen, for the enlargement of the College of Surgeons. Serle-street, leading from this side of the square to Carey-street, derives its name from a former proprietor, Henry Serle, who died about 1690.

The east side of the square is occupied by the noble buildings of Lincoln's-inn Hall and Library. This hall is the finest in London with the exception of Westminster Hall, being 120 ft. long, 45 broad, and 64 high. The oak roof, divided into seven compartments, is a remarkable feature of the interior. At the northern end is a fresco painted by G. F. Watts, R.A., entitled "The Lawgivers," which is unfortunately fading. This work was done by the artist gratuitously, but when it was completed the Inn presented him with a gold cup containing eight hundred sovereigns. Among others in the fine collection of paintings here is Hogarth's "Paul before Felix." The new hall was opened by the Queen and Prince Consort in 1845. The total cost was £88,000, the architect being Philip Hardwick, R.A. The library contains some 40,000 volumes. On this side the fields have an approach from Chancery-lane; the gateway of red brick over the entrance bearing the date 1518. Over this gateway Oliver Cromwell is said to have lived for some time, and tradition also relates that Ben Jonson worked as a common bricklayer in the erection of the adjoining wall about 1617; but the truth of this is very doubtful, as by this time he had written some of his best plays.

The most notable building on the north side is the Soane Museum. This was founded by a bequest of Sir John Soane, the son of a country bricklayer, who rose to great eminence as an architect. His chief work was the Bank of England, and he became ultimately Professor of Architecture at the Royal Academy. The museum is crowded from top to bottom with curiosities of every description. There are also several masterpieces by Hogarth, Turner, and Sir Joshua Reynolds.

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\* Cibber's "Apology," ed. 1740, p. 254.

It is strange that this museum, which is open free to the public, should be as little known as it is. Parallel with this side of the fields, and between it and Holborn, is a narrow roadway known as Whetstone-park. It derives its name from William Whetstone, a tobacconist, and also overseer of this parish in the time of Charles I. and the Commonwealth. The name of park certainly seems out of place as applied to a row of buildings chiefly consisting of stables and workshops. It has borne in times past a very bad name, owing to the resort here of loose characters. Several references to these are to be found in the plays of Dryden, and other allusions in Butler's "Hudibras" and the "London Spy." But Whetstone-park can boast at least one distinguished inhabitant. Milton moved in 1645 from a house in Barbican "to a smaller house in Holborn, which opened backward into Lincoln's Inn Fields."\* In this case his garden must have been built over by these houses of ill-fame.

In giving these particulars about the most important buildings surrounding the fields, we have incidentally mentioned some of the eminent inhabitants. The list is a very lengthy one, including several Lord Chancellors, Chief Justices and Sir William Blackstone among the legal world, the celebrated Duchess of Marlborough, John Locke, William Pitt, and several other members of the nobility. Nell Gwynne was lodging in Lincoln's-inn-fields when her first son, afterwards Duke of St. Albans, was born. Such then are some of the names which have helped to make Lincoln's-inn-fields famous, and though now shorn in many respects of its former eminence, it may well be content to live in its past records.

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\* Philips' "Life of Milton."

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